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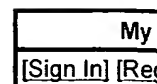
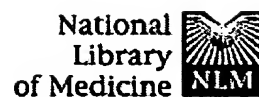
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# Mitochondrial Permeability Transition in CNS Trauma: Cause or Effect of Neuronal Cell Death?

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Experimental traumatic brain injury (TBI) and spinal cord injury (SCI) result in a rapid and significant necrosis of neuronal tissue at the site of injury. In the ensuing hours and days, secondary injury exacerbates the primary damage, resulting in significant neurologic dysfunction. It is believed that alterations in excitatory amino acids (EAA), increased reactive oxygen species (ROS), and the disruption of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis are major factors contributing to the ensuing neuropathology. Mitochondria serve as the powerhouse of the cell by maintaining ratios of ATP:ADP that thermodynamically favor the hydrolysis of ATP to ADP +  $\text{P}_i$ , yet a byproduct of this process is the generation of ROS. Proton-pumping by components of the electron transport system (ETS) generates a membrane potential ( $\Delta\Psi$ ) that can then be used to phosphorylate ADP or sequester  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  out of the cytosol into the mitochondrial matrix. This allows mitochondria to act as cellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sinks and to be in phase with changes in cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  levels. Under extreme loads of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , however, opening of the mitochondrial permeability transition pore (mPTP) results in the extrusion of mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and other high- and low-molecular weight components. This catastrophic event discharges  $\Delta\Psi$  and uncouples the ETS from ATP production. Cyclosporin A (CsA), a potent immunosuppressive drug, inhibits mitochondrial permeability transition (mPT) by binding to matrix cyclophilin D and blocking its binding to the adenine nucleotide translocator. Peripherally administered CsA attenuates mitochondrial dysfunction and neuronal damage in an experimental rodent model of TBI, in a dose-dependent manner. The underlying mechanism of neuroprotection afforded by CsA is most likely via interaction with the mPTP because the immunosuppressant FK506, which has no effect on the mPT, was not neuroprotective. When CsA was administered after experimental SCI at the same dosage and regimen used TBI paradigms, however, it had no beneficial neuroprotective effects. This review takes a comprehensive and critical look at the evidence supporting the role for mPT in central nervous system (CNS) trauma and highlights the differential

responses of CNS mitochondria to mPT induction and the implications this has for therapeutically targeting the mPT in TBI and SCI. © 2004 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

**Key words:** neuronal cell death; reactive oxygen species; mitochondrial permeability transition pore; mitochondrial dysfunction; traumatic brain injury; spinal cord injury

Mitochondria are uniquely poised to play a pivotal role in neuronal cell survival or death after central nervous system (CNS) injury because they are regulators of both energy metabolism and apoptotic pathways (Fiskum, 2000; Wieloch, 2001; Friberg and Wieloch, 2002). Maintaining mitochondrial homeostasis and bioenergetics in neurons is even more critical due to their almost complete dependence on mitochondrial-derived ATP (Budd and Nicholls, 1998; Sullivan et al., 1998, 2000a; Nicholls and Budd, 2000). Mitochondria also serve as high capacity  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  sinks, which allows them to stay in tune with changes in cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  loads and aid in maintaining cellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis that is required for normal neuronal function (Ichas and Mazat, 1998; Rizzuto et al., 1999, 2000). Conversely, excessive  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  uptake into mitochondria has been shown to increase reactive oxygen species (ROS) production, inhibit ATP synthesis, release cytochrome c, and induce mitochondrial permeability transitions (Sullivan et al., 1999b, 2000a, 2004; Jiang et al., 2001; Brustovetsky et al., 2002, 2003).

The mitochondrial permeability transition (mPT) is defined as the sudden increase of inner mitochondrial membrane permeability to solutes of molecular mass less than 1,500 Daltons (Gebicki and Hunter, 1964; Hunter

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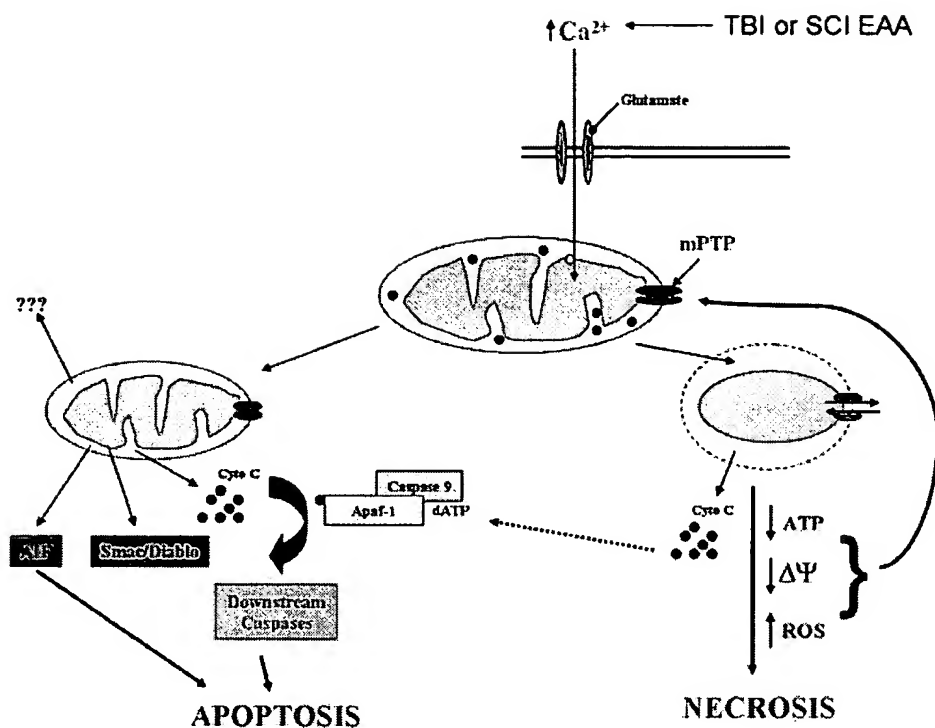


Fig. 1. Highly simplified schematic diagram illustrating the pivotal role of mitochondria in apoptotic and necrotic neuronal cell death after CNS injury. After traumatic brain injury (TBI) or spinal cord injury (SCI), excitatory amino acid (EAA) release increases  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx into neurons. Mitochondria sequester the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in an effort to maintain cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis. Excessive mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  cycling/loading can result in mitochondrial permeability that can be mediated by the mitochondrial permeability transition pore (mPTP) opening or via increased permeability of the outer membrane without mPTP

opening. In either case proapoptotic proteins such as Smac/Diablo, apoptosis-inducing factor (AIF), and cytochrome c (Cyto C) can be released from the mitochondria leading to activation of downstream caspases and apoptosis.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mPTP results in increased conductance of the inner membrane, mitochondrial swelling, loss of ATP production due to decreased membrane potential ( $\Delta\Psi$ ), and increased reactive oxygen species (ROS) production. These events promote mPTP and can lead to necrosis depending on the extent and severity of the insult/injury.

et al., 1964a,b; Bernardi et al., 1994; Bernardi, 1996; Nicoli et al., 1996). Strong evidence now exists that the mPT is due to the opening of a nonselective megachannel (estimated to be 2–3 nm in diameter) referred to as the mitochondrial permeability transition pore (mPTP) (Szabo and Zoratti, 1991, 1992; Szabo et al., 1992). Because the chemiosmotic theory is based on the inner membrane being impermeable to solutes that are not specifically transported, mPT would collapse the mitochondrial membrane potential ( $\Delta\Psi$ ) and uncouple the electron transport system from the production of ATP. Additionally mPT results in mitochondrial swelling and can lead to the release of proapoptotic proteins (Fig. 1). Importantly,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{P}_i$ , oxidative stress, and low inner membrane potentials promote the onset of mPT, whereas cyclosporin A (CsA),  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ , ADP, and the existence of a high membrane potential oppose the onset (Bernardi, 1996; Hansson et al., 2004).

The molecular identity of the mPTP has not yet been established, but the current accepted model points to several well-known membrane components, as well as proteins found in the cytosol, the intermembrane space,

and the matrix of mitochondria. The adenine nucleotide translocase (ANT) has been proposed to be a core component of the mPTP (Halestrap and Davidson, 1990; Halestrap et al., 1997; Woodfield et al., 1998; McStay et al., 2002; Halestrap and Brenner, 2003); however, its role is controversial (Clarke et al., 2002; Halestrap et al., 2002; Waldmeier et al., 2003; Kokoszka et al., 2004). ANT is located in the inner mitochondrial membrane and may play a central role in the formation of the pore by establishing complexes with outer mitochondrial membrane proteins such as Porin (VDAC) to create contact sites that stabilize or enlarge the pore complex (Bernardi et al., 1994; Zoratti and Szabo, 1994; Beutner et al., 1998). When reconstituted, these ANT-VDAC complexes have been shown to bind several other proteins that are known to modulate the mPTP, including the cytosolic protein hexokinase and creatine kinase, which is found in the mitochondrial intermembrane space (Beutner et al., 1996, 1998). Additionally, Bcl-2 antiapoptotic proteins and proapoptotic proteins such as Bax bind the ANT-VDAC complex (Marzo et al., 1998; Brenner et al., 2000). The ANT may also be the site of action for the most potent

inhibitor of the mPTP, CsA via its interaction with cyclophilin-D (CyP-D).

CsA is an undecapeptide of fungal origin that is used clinically as an immunosuppressive agent. CsA immunosuppressive properties stem from its inhibition of calcineurin. CyP-D is a matrix specific peptidyl-prolyl *cis-trans* isomerase that translocates from the matrix to the mPTP where it is proposed to interact with the ANT and induce pore formation (Halestrap and Davidson, 1990; Halestrap et al., 1997; Clarke et al., 2002; Halestrap et al., 2002; Waldmeier et al., 2003). CsA or its nonimmunosuppressive analog *N*-methyl-Val-4-CsA inhibits the mPT by blocking the interaction of CyP-D with the ANT, thus blocking a conformational change in ANT (Broekemeier et al., 1989; Szabo and Zoratti, 1991; Connern and Halestrap, 1994; Broekemeier and Pfeiffer, 1995). Other modulators of the ANT and the mPTP include bongkrekic acid and atractyloside, which inhibit and induce, respectively, the induction of the mPT (Brustovetsky and Dubinsky, 2000; Jiang et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2004).

Although an exact physiologic role for the mPT has not yet been established, several studies have implicated a role for mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  cycling after the induction of long-term potentiation (Stanton and Schanne, 1986; Bindokas et al., 1998) and that CsA blocks both long-term potentiation and long-term depression (Lu et al., 1996; Kamal et al., 1999). It is apparent, however, that prolonged opening of the mPTP would inactivate mitochondria rapidly and result in cell death. This would indicate a clear role for the mPT in neuropathology. The mPT may be of particular importance after traumatic brain injury (TBI) and spinal cord injury (SCI) because many pro-mPT events are known to occur as a result of these injuries.

#### MITOCHONDRIAL DYSFUNCTION IN TBI AND SCI

Several pathophysiologic events after CNS trauma contribute to neuronal damage and death, including glutamate-mediated excitotoxicity, ROS formation, and subsequent lipid peroxidation (Faden et al., 1989; Braughler and Hall, 1992; Azbill et al., 1997; Sullivan et al., 1998, 1999b). Mitochondrial ROS generation has been shown to increase after glutamate exposure (Coyle and Puttfarcken, 1993; Dugan et al., 1995) and has been linked directly to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  influx into the mitochondria (Reynolds and Hastings, 1995; Prehn, 1998; Scanlon and Reynolds, 1998; Sengpiel et al., 1998; Carriedo et al., 2000; Liang et al., 2000). Furthermore, ROS production and lipid peroxidation increase after experimental TBI (Sullivan et al., 1998) and SCI (Braughler and Hall, 1992; Hall et al., 1992; Azbill et al., 1997), whereas interventions that reduce ROS production at the mitochondrial level have been shown to be neuroprotective in several paradigms (Keller et al., 1998; Sullivan et al., 1999a; Liang et al., 2000).

It has been established that  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mitochondrial dysfunction occurs acutely after TBI (Sullivan et al., 1998, 1999b, 2000a; Lifshitz et al., 2003). Increased mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  loading has also been demonstrated to

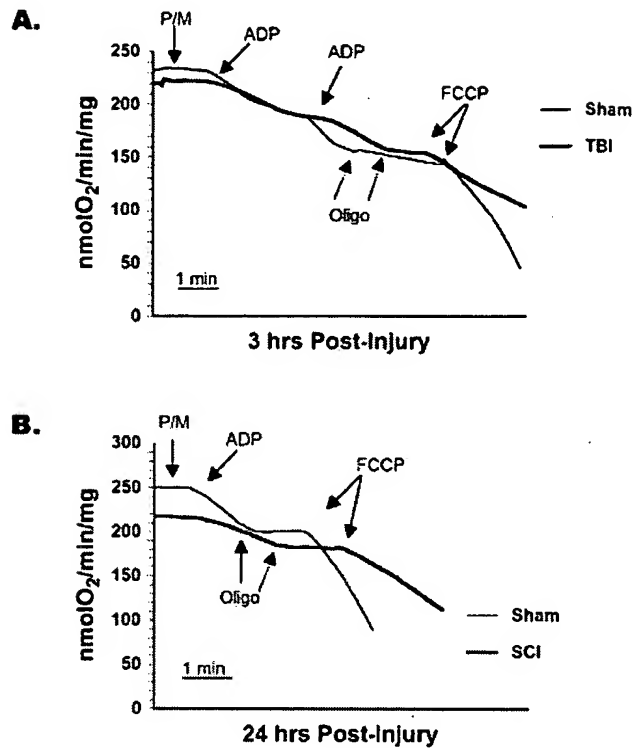


Fig. 2. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) or spinal cord injury (SCI) alter synaptic mitochondrial bioenergetics. Synaptic mitochondria isolated 3 hr post-injury from the injured cortex of TBI animals demonstrate a reduction in respiratory control ratio (rate of respiration in the presence of ADP/rate of respiration in the absence of ADP), a loss of electron transport system capacity (rate of respiration in the presence of the uncoupler FCCP), and a reduction in oxidative phosphorylation evident by reduced  $\text{O}_2$  consumption after the addition of ADP (A). Synaptic mitochondria isolated from the spinal cord of SCI animals demonstrated a similar loss of mitochondria homeostasis even at 24 hr post-injury (B).

occur in neurosynaptosomes isolated from injured brain and spinal cord (Azbill et al., 1997; Sullivan et al., 1999b, 2000a). As illustrated in Figure 2, TBI and SCI both result in reduced mitochondrial bioenergetics demonstrated by altered oxygen consumption during different states of mitochondrial respiration. This loss of mitochondrial electron transport system (ETS) capacity would be expected to reduce  $\Delta\Psi$ , which has been documented in CNS injury (Azbill et al., 1997; Sullivan et al., 1999b, 2000a).

Because these post-injury events (increased mitochondrial  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , increased oxidative damage, and decreased mitochondrial membrane potentials) are known to be associated with mPT induction, it is not surprising that TBI reduces the threshold for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mPT in isolated mitochondria after injury (Sullivan et al., 1999b, 2000a; Lifshitz et al., 2003). Another consequence of mPT that has been documented after TBI and SCI is the redistribution of cytochrome c from mitochondria into the cytosol and activation of downstream caspases (Springer

et al., 1999; Lewen et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2002). These data indicate the prominent role that mitochondria and possibly the mPT play in neuronal cell survival and death after CNS injury.

### THE MPT AS A THERAPEUTIC TARGET IN TBI AND SCI

It has been demonstrated that a pre-injury intrathecal bolus of CsA (20 mg/kg) reduced diffuse axonal injury and  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced cytoskeletal damage after TBI in rats (Okonkwo et al., 1999; Okonkwo and Povlishock, 1999). The clinically relevant question of CsA efficacy post-injury was then tested in two different strains of mice and in rats by Scheff and Sullivan (1999). In this study, CsA was found to significantly reduce cortical damage (50%) after TBI when administered intraperitoneally at 15 min and 24 hr post-injury. It was also shown in this study that there seemed to be a biphasic dose response for the neuroprotective benefits of CsA with the greatest protection afforded by the lowest dose (20 mg/kg, intraperitoneally [i.p.]) (Scheff and Sullivan, 1999).

It was also demonstrated that the immunosuppressive properties of CsA were most likely not responsible for the neuroprotection because the more potent immunosuppressor FK506 afforded no neuroprotection in this paradigm (Scheff and Sullivan, 1999). Both FK506 and CsA inhibit calcineurin, which reduces T-cell activation. In a follow-up study, mitochondrial function was assessed directly after TBI (Sullivan et al., 1999b), and results suggested that the neuroprotective properties of CsA were mediated through modulation of the mPTP and maintenance of mitochondrial homeostasis after TBI. FK506, however, has been shown to reduce diffuse axonal damage when employed in the less severe impact-acceleration model of TBI (Singleton et al., 2001; Suehiro et al., 2001). It was demonstrated that administration of CsA (20 mg/kg; i.p.) 15 min post-injury significantly attenuated mitochondrial dysfunction measured using several biochemical assays of mitochondria integrity and bioenergetics (Fig. 3).

Although CsA is FDA approved and used routinely as an immunosuppressor in clinical settings, it has been shown to have significant dose-dependent neurologic effects, including seizures and cell death (Berden et al., 1985; de Groen et al., 1987; Walker and Brochstein, 1988; Famiglio et al., 1989; Kahan, 1989). It was therefore critical to determine the complete dose curve for CsA neuroprotection after TBI. To address this question, injured animals were administered various dosages of CsA or vehicle 15 min post-injury with a subsequent injection 24 hr later. The most advantageous CsA therapy was a 20 mg/kg bolus i.p. injection initiated 15 min post-injury (Sullivan et al., 2000b). Although other doses of CsA (ranging from 40 mg/kg to 1 mg/kg) significantly reduced cortical damage compared to vehicle-treated animals, the 20-mg/kg dosage afforded the greatest neuroprotection.

The extent of the post-injury therapeutic window was also established in this study by administering the optimal dose of CsA at various times after injury. The results demonstrated that CsA therapy was effective when

initiated at 15 min, 1 hr, or 24 hr post-injury. Paradoxically, the efficacy was lost completely if therapy was initiated at 6 hr post-injury. The fact that delaying the onset of treatment until 24 hr post-injury was as effective as initiation at 1 hr illustrates that the mechanisms responsible for tissue destruction were active and amenable to pharmacologic manipulation at least 24 hr after the initial injury. The lack of neuroprotection by CsA if administration is delayed for 6 hr post-injury may highlight the role the blood-brain barrier (BBB) in designing CNS injury therapeutics (Baldwin et al., 1996). CsA does not freely cross the intact BBB (Shiga et al., 1992; Uchino et al., 1995, 1998), so after TBI this allows targeting of CsA to the injured tissue. Any fluctuations in the permeability (i.e., closure) of the BBB post-injury, however, would also hinder CsA uptake.

Because the time frame of secondary injury resulting from TBI ranges from minutes to days, and given the dynamic state of BBB post-injury, continuous dosing of CsA could be very advantageous. To address this question, animals were administered an i.p. bolus of CsA or vehicle 15 min post-injury, then delivered CsA continuously for 7 days post-injury. All animals receiving CsA demonstrated a significant reduction in lesion volume, with the highest dose offering the most neuroprotection (74% reduction in lesion volume) (Sullivan et al., 2000c). These data highlight the need for designing multiple dosing regimens after TBI. Although all animals receiving CsA were significantly better than were vehicle-treated controls, injured animals receiving only a single bolus injection were afforded the least protection.

These results, coupled with the commonality of mitochondrial dysfunction demonstrated in both TBI and SCI, would indicate that CsA should offer some degree of neuroprotection in the injured spinal cord. Surprisingly, using the optimal dosage and regimen used in our TBI paradigms, CsA had no beneficial effects on histologic sparing after SCI (Rabchevsky et al., 2001). We hypothesized that this differential response to CsA treatment could be due to fundamental differences in brain and spinal cord mitochondria. Differences in the thresholds and responses of mitochondria to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mPT isolated from different regions of the brain are in fact well documented (Friberg et al., 1999; Brustovetsky et al., 2003). Accordingly, our group has reported recently that mitochondria isolated from the brain and spinal cord are significantly divergent (Sullivan et al., 2004).

Specifically, we found significant differences in mitochondrial lipid peroxidation, in situ ROS production, mtDNA oxidation, complex I enzyme activity, and NADH-linked respiration in the spinal cord compared to the cortex. Additionally, specific mitochondrial mRNA levels were reduced significantly in segments of spinal cord compared to that in the cortex. As illustrated in Figure 4, spinal cord mitochondria undergo mPT at significantly lower concentrations of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  than do cortical mitochondria. Increased oxidative stress, however, was sufficient to reduce the threshold for mPT in cortical mitochondrial.

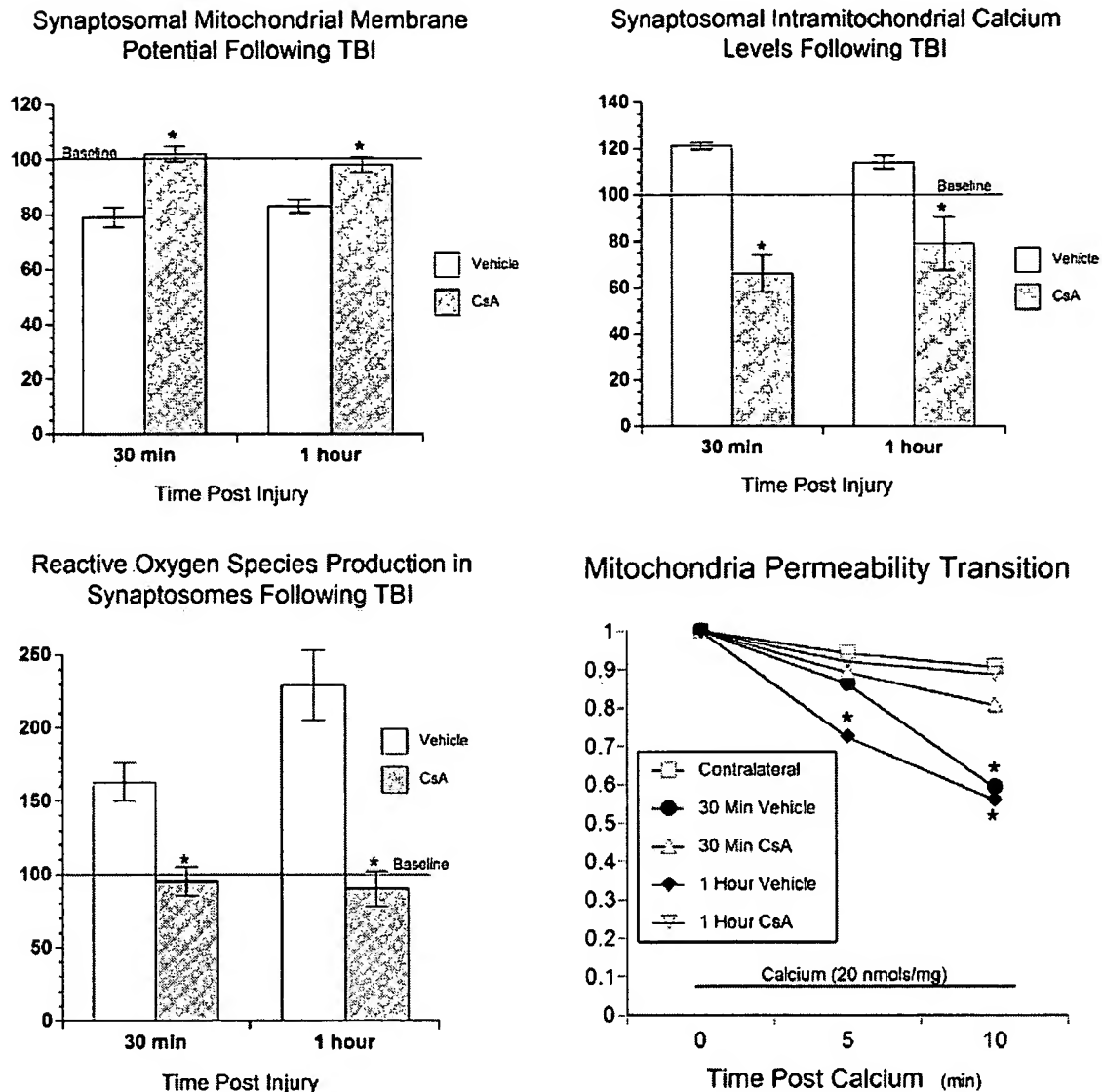


Fig. 3. Cyclosporin A (CsA) improves mitochondrial function after traumatic brain injury (TBI). CsA or vehicle was administered 15 min post-injury and mitochondria isolated from the ipsilateral (injured) or contralateral cortex at 30 min or 1 hr post-injury. Several parameters of mitochondrial function were assessed including membrane potential

(upper left),  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  loads (upper right), reactive oxygen species production (lower left), and the threshold for induction of the permeability transition (lower right). CsA treatment significantly improved all of these outcome measures. Bars are group means  $\pm$  SEM, baseline indicates contralateral levels. Adapted from (Sullivan et al., 1999b).

Because CyP-D mRNA was found to be increased significantly in the spinal cord compared to that in cortex, and because of the lack of CsA neuroprotection in our SCI paradigm, we assessed CsA ability to inhibit mPT. The results clearly demonstrate that CsA was only partially effective in inhibiting  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mPT in spinal cord mitochondria (Fig. 4). Bongkreik acid, on the other hand, was highly effective in preventing  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mPT maximum swelling in both cortical ( $15 \pm 2.4\%$ ) and spinal cord ( $18 \pm 3.6\%$ ) mitochondria (Sullivan et al., 2004).

Given the outcome of these studies, it could be argued that CsA dosage for SCI may need to be much higher than the optimal dosage used in TBI; however, given the toxicity of high doses of CsA, any beneficial effect could be offset. With this in mind, ongoing experiments in our laboratories are employing a nonimmunosuppressive CsA derivative, NIM811, that has been demonstrated to have minimal toxicity compared to CsA (Waldmeier et al., 2002) in both TBI and SCI models. The use of NIM811 will also test directly the hypothesis that the mPT is indeed pivotal to TBI/SCI-induced neu-

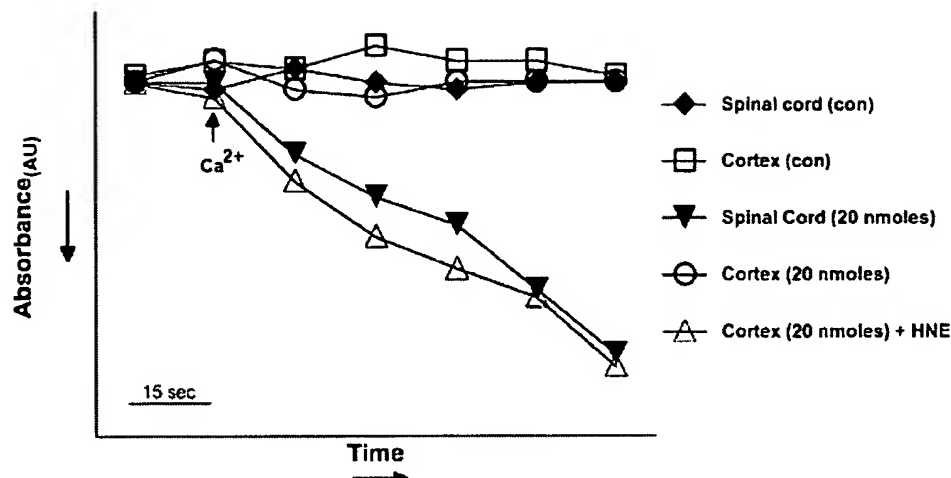
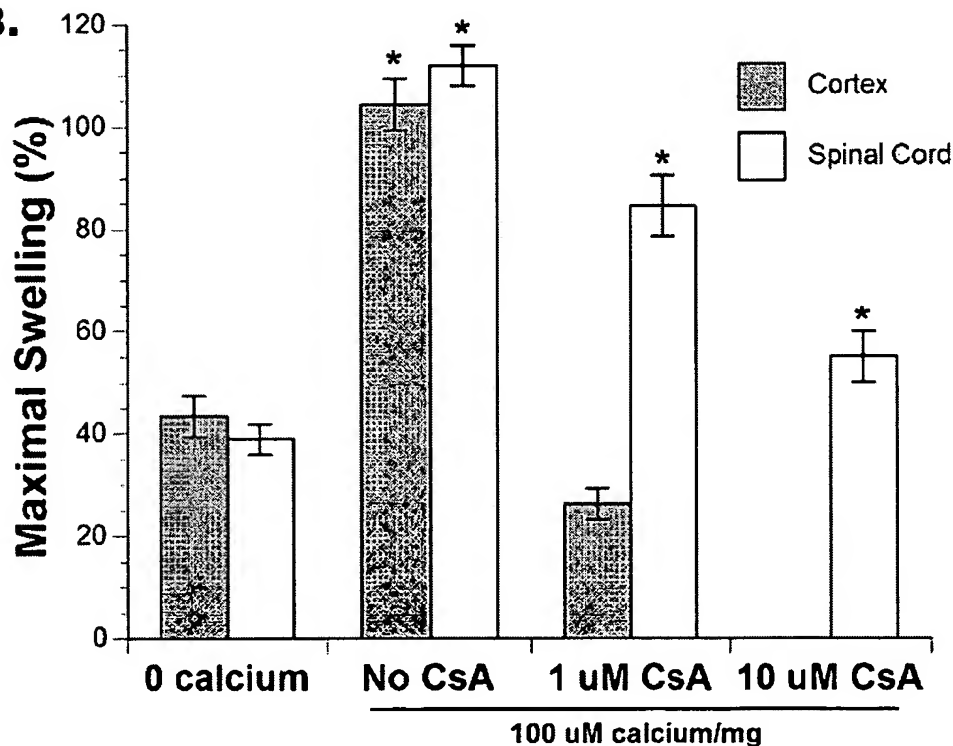
**A.****B.**

Fig. 4. Spinal cord mitochondria have a reduced threshold for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced mitochondrial permeability transition (mPT) compared to that in cortical mitochondria isolated from normal, adult rats. Nonsynaptic mitochondria were isolated from the cortex and spinal cord and the induction of mPT was monitored by following light absorbance decreases, indicative of mitochondrial swelling (A). The addition of 20 nmol  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ /mg of mitochondrial protein induced a rapid loss of absorbance in spinal cord but not cortical mitochondria. Preincubation of cortical mitochondria with the lipid peroxidation product 4-hydroxynonenal (HNE; 10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) to increase oxidative stress altered their response  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . Not surprisingly, concentrations of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  greater than 100 nmol/mg (100  $\mu\text{M}$ ) induced CsA-sensitive swelling in either population of mitochondria (B). Mitochondrial swelling was expressed as a percentage of swelling measured in cortical or spinal cord mitochondria suspended in hypoosmotic buffer. CsA (1  $\mu\text{M}$ ) completely inhibited  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced swelling in cortical mitochondria but had little effect in spinal cord mitochondria. CsA (10  $\mu\text{M}$ ) was able to reduce  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -induced swelling in spinal cord mitochondria but did not completely inhibit the mPT. Bars represent group means  $\pm$  SEM. Adapted from Sullivan et al., 2004.

ronal cell death, and the underlying mechanism of CsA neuroprotection is not related to immunosuppression.

Our preliminary results indicate that NIM811 increases cortical tissue sparing, improves mitochondrial function, and reduces mitochondrial oxidative stress after TBI in adult rats. Unlike CsA, there seems to be no loss of neuroprotection associated with a higher dosage. NIM811 has also been shown to exert neuroprotection, as indicated by a reduction in oxidative damage and im-

proved mitochondrial bioenergetics after SCI when administered at a significantly higher dosage than CsA. These results readily rule out neuroprotection mediated via calcineurin interactions and immunosuppression, but do not implicate completely or exclusively the mPT, because cyclophilins other than CyP-D could bind NIM811. Because no cyclophilins other than CyP-D have been ascribed any neuroprotective attributes, however, these results are overwhelming in support of mPT mod-



ulation in the neuroprotective effects of CsA and its derivatives after CNS injury.

### CLOSING REMARKS

Strategies that target specific mitochondrial events may prove beneficial as therapeutic interventions after CNS injury. This is supported by a wealth of experimental data demonstrating that mitochondrial function is impaired severely after TBI and SCI and that this dysfunction is related to cell death pathways known to be activated in these distinct models. The loss of mitochondrial homeostasis that occurs after CNS injury implies that mPTP activation may be a common link in several models of TBI and SCI. The pathophysiologic role of mPT in CNS injury is also supported by several lines of scientific work that have utilized inhibitors (e.g., CsA and its derivatives) of the mPT in vivo to test this hypothesis. The development of new pharmacologic tools that specifically target the mPT and exhibit minimal toxicity will provide further support for its role in CNS injury and may prove beneficial as possible treatments for this and other neurodegenerative conditions.

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